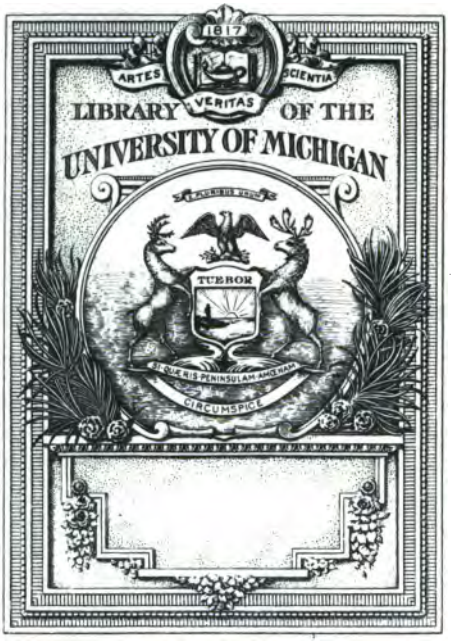
HYMN OF FREE PEOPLES TRIUMPHANT

HERMANN HAGEDORN



By Hermann Hagedorn

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Faces In The Dawn
Makers of Madness
The Great Maze—The Heart of Youth
Where Do You Stand?
You Are The Hope of The World

HYMN OF
FREE PEOPLES
TRIUMPHANT

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

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BY

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NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1918

SET UP AND PRINTED
PUBLISHED 1918

The author is indebted to the editors of *The Outlook* for permission to reprint these verses, which originally appeared in their columns.

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Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon the earth,

That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?

Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds;

Yet he shall perish forever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?

He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night.

I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause

—*Book of Job*

HYMN OF FREE PEOPLES TRIUMPHANT

Out of the depths of defeat, thou hast raised us, O God!
Our enemies came upon us, like thieves they came,
Like waters that burst the sluice, like a down-storming flood,
Like fire on the hills, flaunting to heaven the flame;
Out of the north like the invincible sea
Pounding with breaker on pitiless breaker the shore;

Out of the night like a ravisher stealthily
  Tiptoeing up the stair to an unlocked door—
They crept, they came, they poured, they thundered, they beat.
  We fell before them, like mowed grass we went down.
They smote us, they slew us, they trampled us under their feet;
  They stretched out their greedy hands; to the coveted crown
They stretched out their terrible arms, bristling and vast.

And thou wert with us. They stormed.
And we stood fast.

Out of the arms of the grave, thou hast
drawn us, O Lord!
We cried: "We will strike him here where
his heart lies bare.
He called for the sword, now shall he die
by the sword!
Dreamer of dreams forbidden, we come,
beware!"
We came, we struck, we harried, we
plunged on.
But the monster opened his arms, he
opened them wide,

And in bogs and glades by craft were we
undone,
And he drew us close in his terrible arms,
and we died.
And he smote us again; in the lowlands,
seeking the sea,
By the dunes and the dikes, charging,
he came in his pride!
And we called the fetterless ocean to strike
for the free,
We called our brother the sea to fight at
our side!

And the deep sea covered the fields as men
cover the dead.
And the foe came on through the waters
and floundered and fell;
And again he came on, singing, with lifted
head,
And sank; and again he came on through
the terrible
Waters of death, and we met him, and
hand to hand
Fought in the ruins of homes; in the
storm and the cold
We grappled, we thrust, we stabbed
through that wild lost land;

And "Calais!" he cried, and "Calais!" the
echo rolled.
To the ruins and blood-red waters came
quiet at last.
For thou wert with us. He faltered. But
we stood fast.

Out of the Valley of Death, Lord, thou
hast led us!
By the sea we lay panting with burning
eyes;
By the dunes, by the flooded fields, where
the wind fed us
Despair, and day was blacker with sur-
mise

Than ever night with storms, we crouched; but lo,
On the plains afar, on the brown fields, facing the west,
Not of dismay and imminent overthrow,
Through the day, through the dark, we made a spectral guest;
God, how we came with banners! With drums, we came!
Flashing the sun back, sparkling, we came on!
Our enemy fled. Down the gray gorge of shame
He drew away as the dark draws away from the dawn.

We cried, "Now, he is ours!" but lo, in the
north,
Like a new spear flashing, he sprang;
again; again!
And back and forth we lunged; and back
and forth
Like wrestlers with bloodshot eyes who
heave and strain
At the abyss's edge, we tossed panting; we
sprang back;
Grappled, recoiled; grappled again; lay
still;
Arms locked, eye to red eye demoniac;
Limbs lax; astir only the invincible will.

And again by the white peaks, bugles and victory-laughter,
Legions of marching men, files without end!
Death on the winding roads; slaughter, and triumph after!
Biting winds on the passes and April after
Where the winding roads descend.
God, how we came with banners! God, how they fled,
Crag to crag, leaping, stricken, down the gray slopes!

We crashed upon them like waters bursting
their bed,
Like churning waters, whirling away
their hopes.
"At last! At last! Now is the end!" we cried.
But our enemy thrust from the dark;
terribly he thrust.
And we melted like snow from the gay,
green mountain-side;
To the icy passes we fled like windblown
dust.
And the foe plunged and came on; with
thunder and flame
He cut him a highway and paved it with
bones and blood;

Of eyes and palpitant hearts that knew
thy name,
God, and knew love and beauty and
fatherhood,
An instrument to batter a bastion low
He fashioned him there, God; and smote
us.
Dear Lord,
Who knowest all things, this also thou
dost know;
Not lightly there we yielded to thy
abhorred.
He lunged, he trampled, he plunged; he
swept us aside.

We died, we rose from the dead, we died,
we died.

God, in the Valley, in the silvery canyon of
Death,
Thou gavest our lips water and our lungs
breath;
Thou gavest our eyes sweet pictures to gaze
upon;
Thou gavest our hearts sweet love to feed
upon;
Thou gavest our spirits music of thine own
making,
Of daylight breaking,

And slumbering birds and slumbering worlds
awaking.
Thou gavest our spirits food to eat,
Bread and apples, honey and meat,
And hands to clasp and fields to sow
And children to fondle, as long ago.

Thou art home-fires to them who gave and
are done with giving.
But a ring of ten thousand chariots thou art
to the living!

God, in disaster thou hast been near to us.
We cried, "We will strike our foe by
land and by sea;

In the narrow way, by the strait gate perilous,
Where the black heart blasphemous
Camps and breaks bread with our Lord's black enemy,
We will make us a road; to his throat we will carve us a way!"
Over the sea, over the wine-dark sea,
From the ends of the earth with singing and banter gay
For the love of a ravished bride, sweet Liberty,

We came; and round us were spectres of dazzling ships;
And above us the charging and clashing of clamorous ghosts;
And before us the deathless magic of Helen's lips
And the deep voice of Agamemnon calling his hosts.
Lemnos gave greeting, Samothrace a cheer,
And the ashes of Ilium sang as we drew near.

Lord God, thou knowest that we were glad
to die.
Our strength, our hope, our vision of far,
loved faces,
Of sweet years hand in hand and eye in
eye,
And children and friends, old paths and
familiar places,
Lord, these were all we had to give; we
gave them;
Throwing away our dreams that we might
save them.

We died in the sea, we died in the snares
of the beaches;
We died in the daffodils, when their cups
were red;
We died amid wails and singing and mad-
men's screeches
And crawling fire and under the piled-up
dead.
We landed, we stormed, we stabbed, we
pressed on, we prevailed;
We hungered, we thirsted, we burned, we
fell back, we failed.

God, in black days thou hast kept true to us!
Our enemy laughed; he said, "They are babes at war.
What are they, to match their swords presumptuous
With the sword of a conqueror?"
And he gathered his legions and smote us where we were weak.
With treachery and a sword, with guile and a blow,
He fell on our fields like winter and left them bleak,
He came on our cities like Judgment and trampled them low.

We stood, we fought; by the river, black
with his coming,
For a high price, we sold each drop of
freemen's blood!
But our foe came on with his hordes and
his vultures humming;
Like a glacier, darkly, like a slow-rising
flood,
Like a plague of locusts that leaves the
green fields brown,
He came; we fought in the valley, we
poured death from the heights;

We defied the tide; the thunder we thundered down.
But he came as the dark comes, putting out the light;
He came as death comes, putting dreams to flight.
And we fled to the mountains, we fled with our loves in our arms;
Starving and bleeding, we staggered, with Terror behind
Flaring to heaven, and around us the whirling storms
And the snow on our loved ones lost and the pitiless wind.

But our foe cried, "Fools! that die for a
phantom-light!
Shatter your hearts, if you must. I stand.
I am Might!"

II

God, in defeat, in the deluge of black defeat
  Thou blewest upon our courage and kept it burning.
Thou wast a light along the blackened street;
  By empty chairs a promise of returning.
Thou wast the sword of Liberty, agonizing,
  Thou wast the still small voice in the battle's din:
"The wicked are caught in the snares of their own devising.
  Faint not, fight on. Only the just shall win!"

Thou knowest, Lord, we fought and fainted
not.
We suffered all things, hunger and cold
and pain,
Death with the huddled dead, and death,
forgot
In some lost crater alone with the dark
and the rain;
Fever and endless obeying and digging and
carrying
And slaughter and evil winds and gather-
ing and burying.
We bore them all, for something, dim-
discerned,

That in our hearts like white auroras
burned.

And our enemy ravaged our fields and
ravished our treasures,
And he made our maidens and golden
boys his slaves;
And he slaughtered our babes and took our
wives for his pleasures,
And was king by the grace of volleys and
open graves.
And he sent his vultures scattering death
at whim,

And his demon-ships to gather glory for
him;
And the spirits of earth and air came at his
nod
And blew green poisons to put out the eyes
of God.

Under the beak of black hours ravenous,
God of free peoples, Thou hast been true to us!

III

And again our enemy gathered his legions,
and struck.
With flashing of myriad thunders, crashing, he came on.
And the walls of our stronghold shuddered
and heaved and shook,
And the solid earth churned as the sea
in the muddy dawn;
And plunging out of the dark as the waves
of the sea,
Breaker on breaker, he charged the hills of
the free.

And the waves came, broke and ebbed, and
other waves came.
Up from the infinite deep, up the wild
shore
They climbed, they broke in a crackle of
fierce flame;
They surged, they shuddered, they
crumbled, they were no more.
And out of the wallowing ground like the
dead, emerging,
Through the fog and the snow the gray-
green waves came surging.

And our bodies grew faint with slaying,
our eyes grew dim,
And our strong walls sprang in the air
and fell and were dust;
And nearer and nearer the hills' shot-shattered rim
The seething deep his terrible fingers
thrust.
And giddy and sick we faced the charging
mass.
"They shall not pass, dear God! They
shall not pass."

Friend of the free, when man's weak barriers fall,
Thou art a wall, great Lord, thou art a wall!

And we struck our enemy, struck to east and to west,
Struck on the sea, struck in the huddled town.
The darkness we gave no sleep, the silence no rest,
Pity no bed to lay her weariness down.
And the battle boiled and seethed and bubbled and fell

In the rocking cauldron over the coals of hell;
And the breath of a hundred valleys went out in thunder,
And a thousand villages crumbled and were stamped under;
And the strong were afraid and the weak met death with a shout;
And gods, like an empty lamp, sputtered and went out;
And shapes rose out of graves and dragged at kings;
And hands in the dark broke the bright bubbles of kings;

And loud and wild on the uttermost crags
and coasts
Ebbed and flowed the supplications of
ghosts.
And hate the sower was choked by a world
of haters;
And monstrous offspring sprang on their
own creators;
And high seats toppled and proud kings
begged for bread;
And golden banners flared to the dawn,
blood-red;
And nations died and nations rose from
the dead.

And once more our enemy flung forth his
legions; once more
With thundering mouths and drums and
clattering swords
And mad-eyed Terror with torches running
before,
He came, he came with his hordes!

And he beat against us; with iron hands
from our heights
He hurtled us down; from our valleys on
waves of blood,

Terribly on, through the days and the red
nights
He swept us like a flood.

And the snake in the covert hissed, "Break
and flee!"
And the jackal barked in the dark, "He
hangs at your throat!"
But thy children lifted their heads, re-
membering thee,
And stood, and turned, and smote!

Lord God of high heaven, sword and shield
of the free!

Splendor, defender of light and liberty!
Arms to the weak of arm, eyes to the dim
of eye,
Comfort and confidence to them that go
to die!
Confounder of tyranny, smiter of perfidy,
Uplifter of burdens fallen on the way to
thee!
Breaker of snares, blunter of swords,
Terror and turner of infidel hordes,
Pursuer of the foes of light, harrier of the
unjust,
Trampler of the rebellious with hoofs in
the dust!

HYMN

Driver with whips, driver with scorpions,
Driver with thunders, terribler than guns,
Dropper of bursting fire on the hearts of
the proud,
Blower of biting death on the hopes of the
haughty-browed—
Our enemy is shattered,
Our enemy is flown!
His charging hosts are scattered,
His towers are overthrown!
His trumpets trumpet vainly
To stay the last retreat.
The monstrous beast ungainly
Lies at thy conquering feet!

Redeemer of nations, burster of prison-
gates;
Lifter from broken hearts of chains and
weights;
Feeder of famished hearts, joiner of hands,
Returner of exiles from alien strands;
Bringer of morning, bringer of air,
Kindler of laughter in ashes of despair!—
Preserver! Glorious!
From the hills and the crashing sea,
Thy freemen, victorious,
Jubilantly run to Thee!
Not with shouting and singing,
Exultant trumpet or drum,